

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6, 1887.

## ALPHITA.

*Alphita*. A Medico Botanical Glossary from the Bodleian Manuscript Selden B 35. Edited by J. L. G. Mowat, M.A., Fellow of Pembroke College. [*Anecdota Oxoniensia*. Mediæval and Modern Series. Vol. I. Part 2.] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887.)

THIS interesting vocabulary, which Mr. Mowat has transcribed and edited from a manuscript in the Bodleian Library, is offered by him as a contribution to the study of English plant-names. To explain why it has this and also other claims to attention, we must say a word about the class of literature to which it belongs.

When ancient Greek science was first brought to the knowledge of mediæval Europe it was by means of Latin versions of the Greek writers, made not directly, but at second hand, from Arabic versions written or brought into Europe by the Moors. The earliest known Latin translations of certain works of Galen, Hippocrates, and other medical writers, with probably some of Aristotle, originated in this way. On the basis of these versions, which began in the eleventh century with the writings of Constantine the African, a medical literature grew up, containing many Greek words corrupted by passing through an Arabic channel, as well as Arabic and some Latin terms hardly less strange to the mediæval reader. It is clear that these hard words presented great difficulties, not as a matter of language only, but of practical use, since it was difficult for the reader to identify the diseases spoken of and the drugs recommended for their cure.

To remedy the uncertainties and dangers thus arising, a new class of literature sprang up—that of the writers whom we may perhaps call the synonymists or glossarists—who compiled lists of the hard words occurring in medical works of the Arabian school, with explanations in Latin. The most celebrated though not the earliest of these was Simon of Genoa, whose list of medical synonyms, the “Clavus Sanationis,” was largely borrowed from by subsequent writers. Several others might be named, but there are also anonymous collections of the same kind, one of which is the vocabulary or glossary known as “Alphita.”

The anonymous character of this production is not merely a matter of accident. In its present form it is clearly not the work of one writer. A vocabulary or glossary originally intended to explain some work of practical medicine (possibly the “Antidotarium Nicolai,” as Mr. Mowat suggests) was expanded by matter introduced from many sources, and by the work of many hands, till at length it could only be regarded as a sort of joint-stock compilation to which no one man’s name could be attached.

The title under which it goes is not explained (so far as we can see) by Mr. Mowat, and therefore we may say that it is merely the first word of one of the glosses or definitions, “Alphita, farina ordeï idem,” or “ἀλφίτων—the same thing as barley-meal.”

This definition happening to come first in an older form

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of the glossary was taken as its title. It has been reprinted under this title in the “Collectio Salernitana” of De Renzi, and another Bodleian manuscript (Ashmole, 1398) giving what appears to be an abridged form of that now published is also thus headed.

But what has all this to do with English plant-names? Merely this, that when scholars or scribes in Northern Europe copied or edited these glossaries (most if not all of which were produced in Italy) they often added the French or English vernacular names of plants. Hence these glossaries form a supplement to the earlier lists of names published by Prof. Earle in his valuable “English Plant Names.” There is no reason to suppose that these names were contemporary with the original composition; we may rather assign them to the date of the manuscript, which Mr. Mowat refers to the fifteenth century. They thus form a connecting-link between the Anglo-Saxon and Old English names of the earlier lists, and those which we find in Gerarde and the printed “Herbals” which preceded his. Some of these are very interesting, and have been elucidated with much skill in Mr. Mowat’s most laborious and valuable notes; the corrupt and barbarous forms of the Greek and Latin words making them often difficult of recognition.

The interest of the work then lies in the preservation of a number of plant-names; and it is worth inquiring first of all in what way the English names have been identified with their classical equivalents. Sometimes the modern name is a mere corruption of the ancient, as in rose, bugloss, tansy, and numbers more. Sometimes the one is a translation of the other; hound’s tongue, coltsfoot, cranesbill, are familiar instances. But when a name was thus altered or translated it did not follow that the plant was identified. A curious instance of the confusion which may arise is the following.

Eleutropia, or elitropia, evidently represents the Greek ἡλιотρόπιον = heliotropium, and the Latin equivalents *Solsequium* and *Sponsa solis* have the same meaning, viz. a flower which turns to the sun; and an Anglo-Saxon glossarist (quoted by Earle) boldly translates the Latin as *Sigel hweorfa* (turning to the sun). It might still, however, remain doubtful what flower was meant; but when we find *Calendula* used as a synonym of *Solsequium*, and when we read in “Alphita” (p. 88), “*Kalendula, sponsa solis, incuba* idem, *Anglice* goldwurt vel rodez,” we see that the marigold, a common garden flower in the Middle Ages, and known as golde, gold wort, rode-wort, ruddes, marigolds, mary gowles, &c., is meant (though by the bye it had only borrowed from the marsh marigold—*Caltha palustris*—a name which originally belonged to the latter). The Latin name points clearly to the *Calendula* folding its flowers when the sun goes down.

But the synonym *incuba* in the above line betrays a confusion with *intybum*, chicory, as shown again in the gloss (p. 53): “*Eleutropia, incuba, sponsa solis vel mira solis solsequium cicoria idem, anglice et gallice cicoree*,” or in the line from “*Sinonoma Bartolomei*” which seems meant for a hexameter: “*Incuba, solsequium, cicorea que sponsa que solis*.” Gerarde also gives *sponsa solis* as a name of chicory. So that both marigold and chicory are made synonyms of heliotropium. The curious thing is that the glossary gives definitions quoted from Dioscorides of a larger and lesser “Eliotropium,” neither

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of which can be identified with either of the plants above mentioned.

The glossarist can hardly have supposed that marigold and chicory meant the same thing, but he was evidently lazy as to the meaning of *incubus*, which occurs again in the following gloss (p. 39): "*Cicuta, celena, incubus, coniza vel conium, herba benedicta idem. Gallice chanele vel chanelire; angl. hemelok vel hornwistel.*"

Gerarde has preserved the name Herb Bennet; the other synonyms we must leave Mr. Mowat to explain. He suggests that the strange name hornwistel may be derived from the offensive smell of the plant. Very likely he is right, but, without any pretensions to philological learning, we may suggest that a hemlock stem is easily converted into a *whistle*.

At p. 156 we have the true etymology of the deceptive name meadow-sweet, "*Reginela, Regina Prati, mede-wort,*" the English name meaning a plant used for flavouring mead, and altered into meadow-sweet possibly, as Dr. Prior suggests, through some confusion with Regina Prati, queen of the meadow, which name, again, is preserved in the French "*Reine des Prés.*"

Several glosses give the old form of primrose, *primerole*, a diminutive of Italian *prima vera*, the first flower of spring; and show, moreover, that this name was originally assigned to the daisy, called also *Consolida minor*, of which the German "*Ortus Sanitatis*" gives an unmistakable figure. The reason evidently was that our primrose is a rare flower in Italy, where the daisy is the herald of spring, but the northern botanists found the name better suited to the flower which now bears it, or to the cowslip, *herba Sancti Petri*.

It is still more startling to find *Ligustrum* (or modern privet) glossed in some lists (though not in this) as primrose or cowslip. But whatever plant may have been originally meant by *Ligustrum*, the name privet, or primet, was, as shown by Dr. Prior, originally identical in meaning and almost in etymology with primrose, being derived from French Prime-printemps = Primprint, primet, or prim. Why the Latin name was at one time applied to the flower, at another to the shrub now thus called, is not quite clear.

A curious relic of ancient medicine is preserved in the gloss (p. 5): "*Allium domesticum, tyriaca rusticorum, gall. angl. garleke.*" Here *tyriaca* = *θηριακή* = *theriaca* (treacle), a once celebrated antidote against snakes and venomous animals. A plant supposed to be the garlick was called by Galen a name rendered in Latin *Theriaca rusticorum*, and so became "poor man's treacle," a name which garlick still bears, though the modern transference of the word treacle to molasses makes it appear absurd.

The medical terms in "*Alphita*" are extremely interesting, but space forbids entering upon the subject. One curious instance may, however, be quoted, which shows that "there is nothing new under the sun." Only last year Prof. Liebreich, of Berlin, introduced to the medical world, under the name of "lanoline," a new fatty substance for ointments, derived from wool, which has proved a most successful novelty. Now, we find in our glossary the following: "*Ysopus cerotis vel Ysopus cerotum est succus lane succide per decoctionem extractus. Qualiter efficitur quere in Dyascorides*" (p. 198). *I.e.* "the cerate (or ointment) *Ysopus* is a 'juice' extracted by boiling

from uncleaned wool. For the mode of preparation consult Dioscorides." This is, in fact, *οἶονπος*, or *asopus*, mentioned by Dioscorides and Pliny as a fat extracted from the fleeces of sheep, and is practically identical with Liebreich's lanoline.

While thanking Mr. Mowat for this valuable contribution to the history of mediæval science, and the Clarendon Press for their spirited endeavour to make the treasures of the Bodleian common property, we may suggest that there are other scientific relics equally worthy of attention: such, for instance, as some remarkable illustrated manuscripts of anatomy and natural history, or the works of John Arderne, the English surgeon, a relic at least equal in historical value to those already published, and of far greater national significance.

J. F. PAYNE.

### OUR BOOK SHELF.

*Fresh Woods and Pastures New.* By the Author of "*An Amateur Angler's Days in Dove Dale.*" (London: Sampson Low, 1887.)

In this delightful little volume the amateur angler, who discoursed so pleasantly on the beauties of the streams and fields of Dove Dale a few years ago, recounts his subsequent experiences of country life and amongst country scenes. Angling plays but an inconsiderable part in the present book, but the spirit of the angler is over every chapter—the spirit, namely, which finds placid enjoyment in all the sights and sounds of Nature, and something new and interesting everywhere. His motto is, that the old simplicity of the country "though hid in grey, Doth look more gay Than foppery in plush and scarlet clad." Of this capacity for finding amusement everywhere the chapter on turkeys and peacocks is an example. A battle between two flocks of turkeys is described with much humour; the method in which these birds fight is perhaps new even to persons who think they know a good deal about turkeys; it certainly will be to others. Again, the description of a peacock going to roost is full of quiet fun; few persons, even of those who live in the country, have ever seen a peacock perform the feat of flying into a tree for the night. Yet it is a feat to which great importance is attached by the bird himself; it is only to be done with great circumspection, hesitation, and show of indifference. A score of other topics connected with the country are treated with a like charm. The little book, both in subjects and mode of treatment, is a gem.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. Neither can he undertake to return, or to correspond with the writers of, rejected manuscripts. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

[The Editor urgently requests correspondents to keep their letters as short as possible. The pressure on his space is so great that it is impossible otherwise to insure the appearance even of communications containing interesting and novel facts.]

### The British Museum and American Museums.

I VERY much regret to learn that my friend Prof. Flower thinks I have done great injustice to the British Museum of Natural History in my article on "American Museums," which has appeared in the September number of the *Fortnightly Review*. The article was sent to England last February, and I had no opportunity of correcting the proofs, as some very bad misprints will sufficiently indicate. Nothing was farther from my mind than to make any reflections on the management or arrangement of the Museum by